

Carter's Grove
Near Williamsburg
James City County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-351

HABS
VA
48-WIL.V,
1-

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

HABS No. VA-351

HABS
VA

U8 WILB.
1-

CARTER'S GROVE
Near Williamsburg, James City County, Virginia

Owner: Mrs. Archibald McCrae

Date of erection: 1751

Builder: Carter Burwell

Present condition: Good, modernized

Description:

Up to the time it was modernized Carter's Grove was fortunate in escaping any but minor changes and was undoubtedly the most important architectural survival of eighteenth-century Virginia architecture. In 1928 the roof was raised about eleven feet, dormers were added, the dependencies were increased in depth by demolishing their south walls and rebuilding them on a line with the south wall of the house, and connections were added. On the interior the small rooms at the northeast and northwest corners were removed, thus enlarging the other rooms; and the stair was carried up to the attic with an extra flight, it formerly having terminated at the second floor. Various changes were also made on the second floor.

The structure is of brick laid in Flemish bond, with red rubbed and gauged dressings and trim. The windows have rubbed jamb brick and gauged flat arches elaborately jointed. Both doorways are treated with moulded and gauged pediments, that on the south front being supported by pilasters and that on the north by the brick frame of the doorway. The water-table is unusual in that two courses of brick form one moulding, a torus, above which is a small cove. The belt course at the second-floor line is a flat four-course feature which stops short of the corners to allow the brick dressings of the corner of the house to continue unbroken. This is an unusual feature and can be seen in the Powder Horn at Williamsburg. The cornice is of wood with modillions. The roof formerly was pitched about 40 degrees, with a pronounced splay at the eaves. The chimneystacks are rebuilt on the original lines, with elaborately moulded caps similar to those at the Nelson house in Yorktown. The north front is five bays wide with a center door, and the south front seven bays. Each end has two windows on each floor. All sash is nine-over-nine lights and is original.

The dependencies are of brick, laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers. They were substantially changed in the modernization, evidently in an attempt to make them resemble those at

Westover. They were extended to the south, the increase in depth bringing the roof-ridge up to the line of the cornice of the main house. The chimneys were formerly much lighter in bulk and lacked the great arched hoods. The dormers were formerly gabled, with six-over-six-light sash. Except for the north face of the west dependency all the elevations were three bays long with a center door and three dormers on the roof. The lower windows had nine-over-nine-light sash.

The interior possesses perhaps the finest Georgian woodwork in Virginia. The rooms on the first floor are paneled in hard pine, once painted but now cleaned off and stained. The south entrance hall is a large rectangular room with an arch in the north wall leading to the stair hall. The entrance hall is treated with Ionic pilasters flanking the doorways to the east and west rooms. The full entablature that surrounds the room breaks out over the pilasters, accenting the doorways. The entablature is formed by a full architrave, a pulvinated frieze, and a modillioned cornice. Where it breaks out over the doors and arch to the stair the soffit is enriched with carved running ornament. The walls themselves are treated with a sheathed dado with richly moulded cap and base, above which are a series of broad moulded panels. The windows have paneled splayed jambs and window seats. Especially fine is the paneling and detail of the doors. These are of eight panels (two horizontal at top and at lock rail) and, in common with the paneling, have double moulded styles and rails and beveled and beaded panels. About 1900 or so the doors were taken off the original hinges and rehung. The former hinges, of which one came to the attention of the writer, are of the type called mortised dovetail hinges. They were of brass elaborately worked at the butt. The flanges were splayed, like a dovetail; one was plain and one drilled for screws. This latter flange was set in underneath the trim to the door frame, which was mortised out to receive it. The other flange was mortised into the style of the door, and into the space between the flange and the mortise, wedges were driven in glue. In this way no part of the hinge showed other than the butt. This is evidence that hinges were minimized rather than accented as they are today in old houses.

The paneling in the south rooms closely followed that of the hall, but the Doric order was used, with triglyphs and metopes, the latter being enriched. In the west room is a fine contemporary English marble mantel. In the east room the overmantel panel is missing, the area being sheathed, and the fireplace opening is trimmed with a narrow wood moulding richly carved. The north rooms have plain paneling. Formerly, the areas toward the east and west walls were partitioned off into narrow service rooms.

The stair is the feature of the house. The arch from which it ascends has its soffit enriched with a Greek-key pattern, and

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

HABS No. VA-351
Page 3

the stair well opening is similarly treated. The stair has a scrolled rail over terminal newel, and the rail continues over the minor posts with ramps and easings. The balusters are of walnut and are elaborately turned, with variations of a vase below a longer shaft. There are three to a tread. The nosings are of walnut applied to the pine treads with dowels, the ends of which are concealed by inlaid fleur-de-lis. The landings of the stairs are of pine and walnut parquetry set in a geometric pattern.

The second floor has further original woodwork but was not available for examination.

Additional data:

Carter's Grove mansion was commenced in 1751 and completed in 1753, if the evidence of Carter Burwell's account book is reliable. The first dated payment in the book (which is now owned by his descendant, Mr. George Burwell, of Millwood, Virginia) is June 14, 1751, though three small items are mentioned before it. The last item in the book is dated December 8, 1753. Unfortunately the accounts are not very explicit, and, aside from enumerating the names of craftsmen and others, merely list a few materials which were purchased for the structure. These latter include £69.0.0 for Mr. Page--perhaps Mann Page of Rosewell in Gloucester County, as a further entry shows an item of £6.0.0 paid two bricklayers from Gloucester. The most significant payment is £115 to David Minitree for "building me a brick House according to Agreement" and a supplementary gift of £25. A further account disproves the now generally accepted story that Minitree was brought from England for the purpose of building the mansion. This is that of Richard Bayliss. Dated 1752, this occurs below Minitree's account on the same page. The division between the two accounts was evidently not noted and the entry "To Cash paid to Captain Matthew Johnson for the Passage of yourself and Family £23.13.9" was ascribed to Minitree. The accounts make it perfectly clear, however, that Bayliss was transported and not Minitree.

Unfortunately nothing is known of the source of the design for Carter's Grove. Minitree may or may not have been the designer, although he was certainly the builder. The exterior of the house shows its kinship with the architecture of the region, while the interior is much finer and savors more of the work at Kingston-on-Thames near London and in London itself. This is no doubt attributable to Bayliss, who may have designed and worked the interior trim.

The house was built by Carter Burwell on land given him by his father-in-law, Robert Carter of Corotoman.

Author: Thomas T. Waterman
Date: May 26, 1941

Addendum to:

Carter's Grove

.2 mile west of Grices Run; .7 mile southwest of
U.S. Route 60; .2 mile southeast of intersection
with State Route 667

Williamsburg vicinity

James City County

Virginia

HABS No. VA-351

HABS,

VA.

48-WIL.V.

1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ADDENDUM TO:
CARTER'S GROVE
U.S. Route 60 vicinity
Williamsburg vicinity
James City County
Virginia

HABS VA-351
VA, 48-WIL. V, 1-

PAPER COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001